

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00

PM-07 INR-10 L-03 NEA-10 NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 ACDA-19 MC-02 SS-20 NSC-10 EB-11

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9583

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

CIA

AMEMBASSY LONDO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 0180

DELIVER TO S/PRS AND EUR/RPM IMMEDIATE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MILI, BE

SUBJECT: REPORTED THEFT OF NATO MISSILES

REF: STATE 4795 AND BRUSSELS 154 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: WHILE MEDIA COVERAGE BASED ON BLEGIAN FOREIGN
MINISTRY PRESS BRIEFING SPECULATIVE AND EXAGGERATED, PRESS
SPOKESMAN DID GIVE NEWSMEN GROUNDS FOR BELIEVING
THAT SOME GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILES ARE MISSING FROM BASES IN
EUROPE. FOREIGN OFFICE THUS FAR UNABLE TO GIVE US REASONABLE
EXPLANATION FOR SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT, AND MINISTRY APPARENTLY
CONSIDERING ISSUING SOME CLARIFICATION. LOCAL PRESS HAS
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INTERMINGLED ALLEGATIONS ABOUT MISSING MISSILES WITH CURRENT

STORIES ABOUT PRESENCE OF SAM 7 MISSILES IN HANDS OF TERRORISTS IN WESTERN EUROPE AND EXTRAORDINARY SECURITY MEASURES BEING TAKEN AT EUROPEAN AIRPORTS AND ON BELGIAN-DUTCH BORDER. OFFICIAL BELGIAN SERVICES ARE UNABLE TO SUBSTANTIATE THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE PRESS SPOKESMAN. END SUMMARY.

2. BELGIAN PRESS OF JANUARY 10 BUILDS ON STATEMENT BY FOREIGN OFFICE PRESS SPOKESMAN IN EXAGGERATED FASHION. "LE PEUPLE" IN ITS LEAD STORY INDULGES IN EXTRAVAGANT SPECULATION, CLAIMING THAT THE MISSING MISSILES RESEMBLE BAZOOKAS AND ARE SIMILAR TO US REDEYE MISSILES. "LA LIBRE BELGIQUE" MIXES ITS REPORT OF THE MISSILE DISAPPEARANCE WITH REPORTING ON THE ALLEGED PRESENCE OF SAM MISSILES IN WESTERN EUROPE. "GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN" STORY CREATES SIMILAR CONFUSION AND REPORTS THAT THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MISSILES FROM EUROPEAN BASES WAS CONFIRMED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. AFTERNOON DAILY "LE SOIR" REPORTS THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESMAN SPOKE OF "SECRET" REPORTS FROM THE SECRET SERVICES OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES SIGNALLING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILES FROM NATO DEPOTS IN EUROPE. "LE SOIR" THEN GOES ON TO STATE: "CERTAIN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS HAVE EVEN SPECIFIED THAT IT CONCERNS THE BELGIAN BASE AT DUREN. THIS INFORMATION WAS CATEGORICALLY DENIED BY THE BELGIAN MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, WHICH UNDERLINED THAT THE NUMBER OF NIKE MISSILES AT THE BASE HAD BEEN CHECKED AND THAT THEY WERE ALL THERE." THE "INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE" REPORT BASED ON WIRE DISPATCHES CITES BELGIAN GOVERNMENT SOURCES FOR A STORY THAT "SEVERAL SMALL GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILES HAVE BEEN STOLEN IN RECENT WEEKS FROM WEST EUROPEAN DEPOTS". US ARMED FORCES NETWORK REPORTED THE STORY THIS MORNING CITING BELGIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY AS A SOURCE AND NOTED THAT SHAPE AUTHORITIES HAD DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF MISSING MISSILES.

3. BELGIAN NEWS AGENCY BELGA TELLS US THAT THE STORY WAS REPORTED BY AFP, REUTERS AND ANP (DUTCH AGENCY). ACCORDING TO BELGA, FOREIGN OFFICE CONFIRMED THE BASIC STORY BUT REFUSED TO ELABORATE INCLUDING WHETHER THE BASES IN QUESTION WERE LOCATED IN WESTERN OR EASTERN EUROPE. WHEN QUERIED BY BELGA, NATO AND BELGIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY SPOKESMAN GAVE "NO COMMENT" REPLIES. SUBSEQUENT BELGA TICKER, HOWEVER, REPORTED THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY TODAY ISSUED A DENIAL OF RUMORS THAT

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THE BELGIAN ARMY BASED AT DUREN IN THE FRG WAS IN ANY WAY INVOLVED.

4. MEMBER OF DEFENSE MINISTER'S CABINET TOLD EMBOFF TODAY CATEGORICALLY THAT THE MINISTRY HAD NOT BEEN THE SOURCE OF ANY OF THE STORIES, WHICH HAD CAUGHT THEM ENTIRELY BY SURPRISE.

5. AS REPORTED IN BRUSSELS 154, FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIALS

(NATO AFFAIRS) HAD ADMITTED TO EMBOFF THAT MINISTRY SPOKESMAN DID SAY THAT "SOME GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILES HAD DISSAPEARED FROM BASES IN EUROPE". ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, PRESS SPOKESMAN THEN REFUSED TO EXPAND ON HIS STATEMENT WHEN QUESTIONED REPEATEDLY BY NEWSMEN, AND OFFICIALS BELIEVE THAT THIS EXPLAINS THE ELABORATE TREATMENT GIVEN THE STORY IN THE LOCAL

PRESS. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH FONOFF OFFICIALS REVEAL AN ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT, AND WE ARE INFORMED THAT PRESS SPOKESMAN HAS BEEN IN CONFERENCE WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S CABINET FOR A GOOD PART OF THE DAY. FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIAL LAST TOLD US THAT SOME CLARIFICATION MIGHT BE ISSUED. WE HAVE TOLD THEM THAT PRESS REPORTS HAVE APPEARED IN THE US, THAT WE EXPECT THE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN WILL BE QUERIED, AND THAT WE WOULD APPRECIATE OFFICIAL CLARIFICATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

6. SOURCES WE HAVE CONTACTED IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, DEFENSE MINISTRY AND BELGIAN SECURITY SERVICES HAVE CATEGORICALLY DENIED HAVING ANY KNOWLEDGE THAT WOULD TEND TO SUBSTANTIATE THE PRESS SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT OR THE ENSUING PRESS REPORTS.

7. SUBSEQUENT TO PREPARATION FOREGOING PARAGRAPHS, PRESS SPOKESMAN (PAEMEN) HAS TOLD US THAT THE EXACT WORDING HE HAD USED, IN REFERRING TO TIGHTENED SECURITY, WAS "THE ALERT HAD BEEN TRIGGERED BY THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MISSILES FROM DEPOTS IN EUROPE". HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAD NOT SPECIFIED THAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT WESTERN OR NATO EUROPE. HE ADDED THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF ISSUING ANY CLARIFICATION OR OF COMMENTING FURTHER ON THE MATTER.

8. COMMENT: AT PRESENT WE CANNOT DETERMINE WHAT LED PAEMEN TO MAKE HIS STATEMENT, BASED ON THE INFORMATION WE HAVE TO DATE. AMBASSADOR IN
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